# Social Questions
## BULLETIN

of the Methodist Federation for Social Service (unofficial), an organization which rejects the method of the struggle for profit as the economic base for society; which seeks to replace it with social-economic planning in order to develop a society without class distinctions and privileges.

VOLUME 28 | DECEMBER, 1938 | NUMBER 10

# The Unemployed and Justice

**In the United States a sum in excess of $258,748,000 is being spent each month for public assistance of one kind or another, reaching into more than 6,500,000 homes, touching the lives of some 21,000,000 persons. Of this sum approximately three-fifths is spent by the WPA, while slightly more than a quarter of the WPA figure goes for relief.**

## TERMS DEFINED

There should be a clear understanding of the various categories of public assistance.

Included in WPA are men and women who do socially constructive work and receive wages; they are not, properly speaking, on relief.

Social security, included in the above monthly figure, covers retirement pensions granted after years of honest work. This is not relief, even though paid by the public through taxation rather than by private employers.

Relief, under the present system, is issued those who for some reason are unemployable and others for whom no work can be found either in private industry or on a public works project, and who are therefore compelled to depend upon a dole. Only such are, in the strict sense of the term, on relief.

## WPA BENEFITS

The system of work assistance, developed during the darkest days of the economic crisis, aimed to put able-bodied workers on some project and to give wages in place of relief. After much stumbling around, the government officials developed reasonably efficient methods of approving local projects that definitely benefit the community.

Detailed enumeration of the constructive gains by work relief is impossible here. Projects have included benefits to health, to living conditions, housing, travel and transportation, and the conservation and extension of natural beauty and resources. Cultural benefits through art, drama, music and education have been enormous.

In New York City alone the educational section of WPA reports 12,000 teachers at work. Comprehensive cumulative records are made for each pupil in the city; adjustment and remedial help is given; therapy is carried on in hospitals and a fuller educational opportunity provided for adults. The recreational leaders have supervised over 12 million people participating in all types of social, recreational, cultural and physical activities. Dental clinics served 821,784 people in July and August, employing 82 dentists.

## AMERICAN PRIMING

"Pump-priming is as American as corn on the cob," says Mr. Harry Hopkins, WPA Administrator. . . . "We have been brought up on the principle that it is all right for government to grant big subsidies to business men, because business men are employers—work-givers. [But] To make government funds available to the poor, except in the minute doses of charity, seems wasteful and unbusinesslike."

It can be shown that the deficit spending from 1933-37 helped raise the level of national income from 40 billion to 70 billion dollars. The expected 63 billion income in 1938 is still 20 billion greater than in 1932. Although the debt is larger, the per capita interest burden on the gross debt is less than in 1919—$7 instead of $10.

## WHEN WPA IS CUT

"What happens when the WPA is cut?" asks the *New Republic* (Oct. 19, 1938). What becomes of the people formerly employed? What is the effect on the community? A study made by the WPA itself in five representative cities—Atlanta, Baltimore, New Bedford, St. Louis and San Francisco — gives us concrete information.

The average WPA wage over the whole country is $55 a month, which gives no leeway for savings. Thirty days after being dismissed, one-fifth have no income whatever. A fifth are living on friends and relatives, and another fifth are dependent mainly on direct relief. Two-fifths are earning on the average $25 per month from work in private industry, almost entirely, of course, part-time and odd jobs. Three months later the proportion on direct relief has risen to about one-half and the proportion that has applied is much larger.

Despite this experience, the last week of November, 1938, finds the papers full of rumors of new cuts in WPA appropriations. The President is "non-committal" and refuses to "give an inkling as to the WPA appropriations to be asked of Congress for the rest of the current fiscal year, saying that his message in January will have to be awaited." Officials of the WPA have vigorously denied the report that there is to be a drastic cut.

However, Mayor LaGuardia, of New York City, has taken the report

*Social Questions*
**BULLETIN**

**Issued monthly, except July and August. The general policies of this publication are determined by the Executive Committee of the Methodist Federation for Social Service, subject to approval by the National Committee of the Federation. The selection of topics and material is committed to the Secretaries, who are responsible to the Federation and to the public for its accuracy.**

**Membership $1.00 per year**

**Special rate to student groups.**

SECRETARIES
Harry F. Ward
Charles C. Webber
Helen G. Murray

OFFICERS
Bishop Francis J. McConnell, *President*
Harris Franklin Rall, *Vice-President*
Gilbert Q. LeSourd, *Secretary-Treasurer*

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
E. Raymond Attebery — David D. Jones
Lester W. Auman — John C. Lazenby
James C. Baker — Halford E. Luccock
Edgar Blake — Chester A. Smith
Gilbert S. Cox — Ralph B. Urmy
Margaret Forsyth — Edgar M. Wahlberg

THE
METHODIST FEDERATION
FOR SOCIAL SERVICE
150 Fifth Avenue,
New York City

Entered as second-class matter January 21, 1919, at the Postoffice at New York, N. Y., under Act of August 24, 1912.

312

seriously enough so that he has entered a protest against the rumored cut to both President Roosevelt and Mr. Hopkins. Moreover, Colonel Somervell, New York WPA administrator, has announced that in accordance with instructions he has received from Washington the City's WPA rolls, beginning December 1, are to be reduced from 175,000 to 165,000 and that the cut will begin with an outright dismissal of 7000 on December 1.

## ARE NEEDS MET?

Do all who need it get the relief they need? In addition to those now receiving direct relief there are untold numbers on the verge of dependency who are denied any kind of help for various reasons. They are "employable"; they are aliens; they are transients; available funds are lacking; they are not "destitute enough."

During the winter of 1938 increased applications for relief drained state and local funds, and state and local governments, faced with the problem of providing more and more relief, resorted to various expedients in an attempt to spread resources over growing needs.

Relief allowances already below levels necessary to maintain life and health were further pared; relief was made "hard to get and difficult to endure"; medical care and clothing allowances were eliminated; administrative expenses were slashed arbitrarily; relief offices were closed periodically, new applicants being refused.

In short, whenever throughout the crisis the federal government has withdrawn relief-financing, the human results have been untold misery and suffering. *(Survey Current Relief Situation, Winter '38,* American Association of Social Workers.)

## MERCY STRAINED

A summary of the findings of the above report indicates:

(1) That the WPA program has not been able to absorb all the employable needy on relief rolls.

(2) That WPA wages are inadequate to provide minimum subsistence to large families in many sections.

(3) That there have been periodic stoppages of relief in many sections and that direct relief allowances have been shockingly low in some areas.

(4) That family groups which include a so-called "employable" member, have frequently been denied any relief.

(5) That malnutrition has been commonly reported among relief families throughout the country.

(6) That available state and local funds for direct relief having been exhausted in many places, "eligibility" rules for relief have been tightened all along the line, relief has been harder to obtain, and allowances have become more and more meagre as funds have run low.

## WAITING FOR RELIEF

How do people live during investigations? Delays are cruelly long. The case of Moe Reif, 534 Greene Ave., Brooklyn, is an illustration. Mr. Reif filled out an application for relief on, or about, March 20, 1938. After waiting for 4 weeks he was told that his case had been accepted for investigation, but that his case was *not* accepted, *after* the investigation. Then on May 3 he was told that his case was accepted but no check was sent him. Finally, on May 25, acceptance of his case was again verified, and 2 or 3 days later, after a 2-month wait, the Reif family received a check.

Instituting court action to establish the ability of legally responsible relatives to support applicants causes other delays. Edward Brady, 83 West 104th St., New York City, applied for relief the last week of April. He was told to sue his father for non-support, although his father was already himself then supporting a family of 3 on $15 a week. The court rejected the case. But the relief office refused help three times. On July 13, with Mr. Brady in a condition of evident starvation, relief was granted.

## "NOT ELIGIBLE"

A typical case is that of a Colorado family. The father was born in Mexico but has lived in Colorado for 30 years. He was laid off in the summer of '37; then worked in the beet fields, not earning enough to support the family with its 6 children ranging from 1 to 12 years. Because the father is not naturalized this family will not receive even the $29 per month allowed in Colorado.

Migratory families who seek work in California are not eligible for local relief, since they are unable to meet the resident requirements of 1 year for state and 3 years for county relief. The Farm Security Administration which expects to give some aid, reports about 13,000 in dire need. Children of these families, living in ditchbank camps and "dirty torn tents or makeshift shacks in a sea of mud," die at the rate of one or two a day in Tulare County, where 90% of the mortality is among children of migrants.

## THE POOR DIE SOON

"Health is a matter of wealth," says Oscar Ameringer. Death comes sooner to the poor.

"In families on relief, acute illness is 47% more prevalent and chronic illness 87% more prevalent than in families with incomes of $3,000 or more, even as non-relief families with

incomes of less than $1,000 have twice as much disability as families with more than $1,000. Infant mortality is five times as high in families with less than $500 a year as in families with $3,000 or more. . . . The majority of low-income families do not receive adequate pre-natal care; at least half the deaths of mothers and children in the first month of life are preventable. . . . About 40 million persons, in families with less than $800 annual income, cannot pay for medical services and in many cases do not receive adequate care." (Josephine Roche.)

## COMPETITIVE MEDICINE

Yet with tragic need for medical services America has unemployed doctors. The City of New York alone has over 1,100 doctors on relief. Too many doctors; millions without doctors' care.

This paradoxical condition in our nation prompted Dr. Hugh Cabot of the Mayo Clinic to ask, "Is it possible in a highly commercialized environment to maintain a service organization on a competitive basis?"

## AMONG THE CRITICS

Despite the facts, some argue that relief is too high. Too high for what? Not too high to prevent unnecessary disability, disease and premature death. Not high enough to maintain health and decency, even on a very low scale.

Some people still argue that poverty is always due to shiftlessness—so relief should be made as humiliating as possible. Some say many won't work unless driven by the lash of hunger—so give as little as possible. And others insist on keeping relief control within the community—to weed out the loafers.

"They often refuse jobs when offered," is a current cliché. But a study made of 262 alleged job-refusals in Buffalo turned up only 8 that seemed unjustifiable refusals. In Washington, D. C., only 4 out of 220 said to have refused jobs, actually had refused a reasonable offer.

Actually, more than one-fifth of those on relief rolls are unemployable through age, sickness or other disability. Then to present-day difficulties in job finding must be added that tragic prejudice encountered by people who have been on relief even for a brief time.

## LEAVE IT TO INDUSTRY?

Could private industry look after the unemployed? Will business pick up so that there will be work for all? "Official statistics show that there were only three-quarters as many jobs in industry in 1936 as in 1920. Employment in industry has declined by one-fifth since 1929." (Public Affairs Pamphlet, "This Question of Relief.")

## HOPELESS YOUTH

Young people perhaps never faced a harder situation than today. Comprising one-sixth of the population of the United States, boys and girls between the ages of 16 to 24, totaled 21,200,000 in 1937, occupationally divided as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Attending schools and colleges | 5,250,000 |
| Home-making or not available for work | 3,200,000 |
| Employed (full time) | 7,100,000 |
| Employed (part time) | 1,800,000 |
| Unemployed | 3,900,000 |

The authors of *A New Deal for Youth* estimate that during the most prosperous months of the last eight years the number of unemployed youth may have dropped to 3,000,000 or less, but may have risen to 7,000,000 in the worst months—a figure equal to the total population of New York City.

Only 56 young men (between 20 and 24 years) out of every hundred were employed full time in November, 1937, as compared with 90 out of every hundred in 1930. One of every three unemployed persons in the United States is a youth from 16 to 24 years of age. In some states the number rises to 39% of the totally unemployed.

The wages of those who are lucky enough to have work are miserably low. In Little Rock, Ark., the median is $8.29 a week. The highest in Reno, Nev., is $18.29. The above figures are for white youth. Negro youth receive a median wage of $8.03 in Charlotte, N. C., $8.75 a week in Durham, N. C., $9.49 in Chicago and $12.01 in the District of Columbia.

Despite the meagreness of the wages, the effect of a job and a pay envelope helps immeasurably to lighten the general atmosphere of want and futility which has surrounded the generation of "depression babies." For years a job has been a fabulous unreality for most of them. One boy describes what it was like until aid reached him through the National Youth Administration.

"Mebbe you don't know what it's like to come home and have everyone looking at you, and you know they're thinking, even though they don't say it, 'He didn't find a job.' It gets terrible. You just don't want to come home. . . . But a guy's gotta eat some place and you gotta sleep some place. . . . I tell you, the first time I walked in the front door with my pay check, I *was* somebody!"

## POLITICAL ABUSES

The charge of politics in relief and public works is aimed at the federal government. But a glance at the machinery will disclose the fact that not only is relief made a local concern but that local officials certify workers for the WPA projects.

At this point must be noted carefully the distinction between WPA and PWA. Workers on WPA projects are for the most part taken from the relief rolls; the aim is primarily to help the individuals concerned and to give assistance to states and communities in solving their relief problems. WPA is supported by federal, state and local funds, but is administered locally. PWA, on the other hand, is supported exclusively by federal funds and administered by federal officials. It exists primarily to take up the slack, to relieve the economic system.

If there are political abuses in WPA they must be laid at the door of these local administrators, and are due as largely to Republican as to Democratic local political corruption.

Congressman Jerry Voorhis states, "My observation of the facts leads me to the conclusion that these charges [of political abuses in WPA administration] are very largely unfounded, but that on the other hand there is substantial truth in the charge, less frequently heard, that powerful *local* political machines have in many cases employed both federal and local

funds for their own purely local advantage. . . .

"The influence of politics in relief is almost always hostile to the progressive movement in American politics, against the New Deal. . . . Where such things exist I am convinced it is due primarily to the misuse of federal funds by local political machines for purely local political ends . . . to perpetuate their usually reactionary rule."

As a drastic means of putting an end to all politics and charges of politics in connection with WPA, Harry L. Hopkins has advocated putting it all under civil service, "lock, stock and barrel."

## PERMANENT PLANNING

"The year 1937 marks the transition in both city and state from a 'temporary' and 'emergency' relief to assistance for the needy as a regular function of government administered by a permanent department." Thus the 1937 New York City Department of Public Welfare report predicts the beginning of permanent provision for the needy by means of a regular department with allowances from the city budget.

"All relief programs adopted to date have been based on the assumption that the need for relief would rapidly disappear with economic recovery. The developments of recent months indicate the falsity of this assumption. . . . Some form of public relief will be needed for many years to come. A permanent relief program should be able to avoid many of the blunders of the emergency period." (Maxwell S. Stewart.)

## MINIMUM PROGRAM

Such a program must recognize the following as minimal requirements:

1. The constant necessity for home relief, based upon need interpreted in terms of both health and comfort, not upon the traditional Elizabethan concept of a miserly existence. It should be administered in cooperation with an integrated national program, by trained social workers—not by political hacks, should protect the self-respect of the recipient, and to that end should be given as a right—not as a dole.

2. A work program conducted by the federal government similar to WPA, which can be contracted or expanded in accordance with the amount of employment offered by private industry and which shall include all kinds of socially useful work.

3. An adequate public employment service to integrate relief, public works and private employment.

"The problem of unemployment is not one that is with us today and gone tomorrow. 'Relief' is not the answer to it. Emergency agencies are not the answer. Only a permanent stable program which will translate America's wealth accurately and fairly into corresponding active consuming power can be the answer." (H. Jerry Voorhis.)

## SOME CHURCHES ACT

The continuing task of the Church, in the face of appalling poverty in a land of plenty, is to arouse the conscience of the people and stir them to conviction.

The Church can plead the cause of the needy and see that adequate relief is humanely administered. To do this, facts must be made known, and some fearless preaching and teaching done to interpret these facts in the light of Jesus' ideal.

Concrete experiments have provided graphic demonstrations of the simple realities of the situation. Here and there ministers have lived for a time on the amount of food allowed to families on relief, have invited their officials to sample meals, have arranged church suppers with relief diet served. (The average allowed in the United States is 6c a person per meal.)

Forums in which both relief officials and recipients participate are conducted in some churches. Hearings, such as that held by W. B. Waltmire in Chicago, bring the entire picture vividly to the people. Often these are instrumental in remedying defects in administration, or in stimulating public support for more adequate relief grants.

The Church can insist upon a fair consideration of the merits of public works projects and of the principles involved in WPA organization. Where the local political machine has corrupted the administration of such projects and organization the Church can press the necessity for proper investigation and insist upon action to eliminate machine corruption.

But most of all the Church needs to stress the basic principle that even adequate relief is not enough; that no form of social insurance is a final solution; that neither is a substitute for a socially effective, because socially just, economic system.

# Using Surpluses

Another manifestation of the perennial paradox of privation in the midst of plenty is shaping up. Secretary Wallace proposes to use government funds to finance a production-for-use program to clothe the ill-clothed "one-third" with some of the seven million bales of cotton that the government has on hand.

As a proposal to clothe the poor this probably wouldn't get to first base, but when this humanitarian motive is combined with political necessity of doing something for cotton planters it becomes a matter worth watching. If it works with cotton, it will be extended to other farm surpluses. (*Survey,* November, 1938.)

### BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

Adamic: *My America* (Harper's, $3.75).
Hicks: *I Like America* (Modern Age, 50c).
Labor Research: *Labor Fact Book* (International Publishers, $2.00).
Caldwell & Bourke-White: *You Have Seen Their Faces* (Modern Age, 75c).
Armstrong: *We Too Are the People* (Little, Brown & Co., $3.00).
Anderson: *The Right to Work* (Modern Age, 50c).
de Kruif: *Why Keep Them Alive?* (Harcourt, $3.50).
de Kruif: *The Fight for Life* (Harcourt, $3.00).

*FICTION*

Johnson: *Jordanstown* (Simon and Schuster, $2.00).
Maltz: *The Way Things Are* (International Publishers, $2.00).

*POETRY*

MacLeish: *Land of the Free* (Harcourt, $3.00).
Sandburg: *The People, Yes* (Harcourt, $2.75).

### PAMPHLET RECOMMENDATIONS

*This Question of Relief* (Public Affairs Pamphlet, 10c).
*Health Security for the Nation* (League for Industrial Democracy, 15c).
*What About Relief?*, by W. B. Waltmire (1717 No. Fairfield Ave., Chicago, Ill., 5c).
*What Is the "American Way"?*, by Harry L. Hopkins (WPA, Washington).
*PWA and Industry* (Bulletin No. 658, U. S. Dept. of Labor).
*Public Welfare in Transition* (Dept. Public Welfare, New York City).
*Economic Notes* (Labor Research, 12 issues, 65c).
*Labor Notes* (Labor Research, 12 issues, 65c).
*Arsenal of Facts* (International Publishers, 25c).

*For the preparation of the major part of this Bulletin we are indebted to Rev. Wayne White.*